

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 03401 102037Z

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ACTION SS-30

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O 101945Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6414

S E C R E T BUENOS AIRES 3401

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: PFOR, AR, US

SUBJ: DISCUSSION WITH FONMIN VIGNES ON REDUCTIONS IN STAFF

1. I CALLED ON FONMIN VIGNES LAST EVENING (MAY 9) AT MY REQUEST AFTER CONVERSATION WITH AMB. BOWDLER TO INFORM HIM OF PLANS TO CLOSE CONSULAR AGENCY IN CORDOBA, WITHDRAW AMERICAN USIS PERSONNEL FROM FOUR PROVINCIA CITIES, AND REDUCE TOTAL NUMBER OF US OFFICIALS IN ARGENTINA. I POINTED OUT THAT BINATIONAL CENTERS AND BRANCH PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICES WOULD BE KEPT OPEN BY LOCAL STAFFS AND IN LATTER CASE SUPERVISED BY EMBASSY CULTURAL SECTION. I EMPHASIZED THAT ONE OF THE STEPS ABOVE WERE RESULT OF ANY CONCLUSION ON OUR PART THAT ARGENTINE POLICE AND OTHER AUTHORITIES HAD NOT DONE THEIR JOBS OR HAD NOT COOPERATED WITH US. ON CONTRARY, IN EVERY INSTANCE IN WHICH WE HAD ASKED FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE, THEY HAD PROVIDED IT QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY. I ACKNOWLEDGED THAT BOTH FONMIN VIGNES AND FEDERAL SECURITY CHIEF MARGARIDE HAD ASSURED ME OF GOA'S FULL WILLINGNESS TO AFFORD ALL POSSIBLE PROTECTION: WE HAD SEEN EVIDENCE OF IT.

2. USG'S RATIONAL IN TAKING STEPS OUTLINED ABOVE, AND ESPECIALLY IN REDUCTION OF PERSONNEL WAS ONE OF LOWERING OUR OWN VISIBILITY SOMEWHAT AND AT SAME TIME REDUCING BURDEN ON ALREADY OVERTAXED ARGENTINE SECURITY SERVICES. THEY WERE COOPERATING WITH US AND WE WISHED TO COOPERATE WITH THEM BY GIVING THEM FIFTY FEWER AMERICAN OFFICIALS

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BUENOS 03401 102037Z

FOR WHOM THEY WOULD HAVE TO PROVIDE PROTECTION. I EXPLAINED

CONCEPT OF REMOVING REGIONAL OFFICES AND NOT REPLACING SOME PERSONNEL DUE TO BE TRANSFERRED DURING SUMMER MONTHS, CONCLUDING THAT WE COULD OPERATE EMBASSY QUITE EFFECTIVELY WITH FEWER EMPLOYEES AND THAT GIVEN SITUATION, WE SHOULD STRIVE TO EXTEND FEASIBLE. I NOTED THAT I HAD BEEN AUTHORIZED BY SECRETARY TO REDUCE MORE DRASTICALLY BUT DID NOT BELIEVE THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY AT THIS TIME.

3. I NOTED MY OWN CONCERN THAT THIS MATTER BE HANDLED WITH GREAT CARE AND DISCRETION LEST IT BE BLOWN OUT OF PROPORTION OR PERHAPS GET INTO PRESS IN NEGATIVE CONTEXT. WE HAD TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT IT WAS NOT SO USED THAT IT COULD BECOME AN IRRITANT BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES AND GOVERNMENTS. FULL CONSULTATIONS AND COORDINATION BETWEEN US WERE THEREFORE NECESSARY. WE WANTED GOA TO KNOW IN ADVANCE EXACTLY WHAT WE PLANNED TO DO AND WHY. THE LAST THING WE WANTED WAS TO CREATE PROBLEMS OR CAUSE EMBARRASSMENT FOR GOA. WE HAD ESTABLISHED USEFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. FOR OUR PART WE WISHED TO CONTINUE IT.

4. VIGNES WAS MOST INTERESTED IN AND CONCERNED BY MY EXPOSITION AND CALLED IN AMBASSADOR MOLINA SALAS, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICY, SO THAT I COULD REPEAT IT TO HIM. REMOVING US PERSONNEL FROM BI-NATIONAL CENTERS IN INTERIOR DID NOT BOTHER THEM; HOWEVER, MATTER OF CLOSING CONSULAR AGENCY WAS SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN. THEY WERE OBVIOUSLY VERY DISTURBED OVER THAT PROSPECT. AMBASSADOR MOLINA SALAS SAID HE BELIEVED IT COULD BE MISINTERPRETED AND WOULD HURT US IMAGE, ESPECIALLY IN CORDOBA. HE DID NOT SAY SO, BUT HE WAS ALSO OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED OVER NEGATIVE IMPACT IT MIGHT HAVE ON ARGENTINA'S IMAGE.

5. FONMIN VIGNES ACCEPTED LOGIC OF REDUCTION IN STAFF HERE IN BUENOS AIRES BUT HOPES IT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY. MOLINA SALAS TENSELY REFERRED TO IT AS A "VERITABLE EXODUS", HOWEVER, WHEN I NOTED THAT INCLUDING DEPENDENTS, THERE WOULD BE SOME 160 AMERICANS LEAVING BUENOS AIRES OVER NEXT FEW MONTHS. VISIBLY SHAKEN, VIGNES INQUIRED ANXIOUSLY IF THIS WOULD BE PHASED WITHDRAWAL OR IF WE PLANNED TO REDUCE IMMEDIATELY AND AT ONE BLOW. I REPLIED THAT THE FORMER WAS THE CASE; REDUCTIONS WOULD BE CARRIED OUT OVER PERIOD OF MONTHS IF WASHINGTON AGREES.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BUENOS 03401 102037Z

6. VIGNES SAID HE HAD BEEN AT RECENT MEETING IN WHICH PRESIDENT PERON HIMSELF HAD ORDERED IN MOST CATEGORIC TERMS THAT FEDERAL POLICE GIVE FULL COOPERATION TO EMBASSY IN ASSURING SAFETY OF ITS STAFF. VIGNES ASKED IF FEDERAL POLICE WERE CARRYING OUT THIS ORDER. I SAID IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THEY MUST BE SINCE THEIR COOPERATION HAD BEEN EXCELLENT. I NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT IN CORDOBA, PROVINCIAL RATHER THAN FEDERAL POLICE WERE RESPON-

SIBLE FOR PROVIDING PROTECTION TO CONSULAR AGENCY. VIGNES SHOOK HIS HEAD AND SAID PROVINCIAL POLICE WERE NOT AS GOOD AS FEDERAL.

7. I REPEATED THAT WE WISHED TO CAUSE NO PROBLEMS FOR GOA, BUT THAT WASHINGTON WAS WELL AWARE OF FACT THAT CERTAIN OTHER EMBASSIES CONTEMPLATED REDUCTIONS. FURTHER, SAMUELSON CASE WITH PAYMENT OF \$14 MILLION RANSOM HAD HAD SERIOUS IMPACT IN US AND CAUSED UNFORTUNATE FLURRY IN PRESS.

8. AFTER DISCUSING MATTER AMONG THEMSELVES, VIGNES AND MOLINA SALAS REQUESTED THAT WE MEET AGAIN ON MAY 14 ALONG WITH SECURITY REPRESENTATIVES FROM BOTH SIDES AND THAT, FOR OUR PART, HE HOPED NO FINAL DECISIONS WOULD BE MADE UNTIL THEN. THEY ESPECIALLY ASKED THAT WE RECONSIDER CLOSING CONSULAR AGENCY IN CORDOBA AND HOLD OFF ON ANY ANNOUNCEMENT UNTIL AFTER MAY 14 MEETING. THEY NOTED THAT CONSULAR AGENT WAS RETIRED BUSINESSMAN WHO WOULD REMAIN RESIDENT IN CORDOBA WHETHER OR NOT OFFICE WAS CLOSED. I AGREED TO RECOMMEND TO WASHINGTON TO HOLD FINAL DECISIONS IN ABEYANCE UNTIL MAY 14 AND SUGGESTED THAT I RETURN TO FONMIN NEXT DAY WITH APPROPRIATE MEMBERS OF STAFF TO DISCUSS THE SECURITY OF AMERICAN PERSONNEL. VIGNES IMMEDIATELY DESIGNATED MOLINA SALAS TO LEAD DISCUSSION.

9. THE CALL WAS A VERY PRODUCTIVE ONE. VIGNES AND MOLINA SALAS WERE BOTH VISIBLY IMPRESSED THAT THE US MEANT BUSINESS. THEY SAW CLEARLY NEGATIVE ASPECTS FOR ARGENTINA IN CLOSING TRADE CENTER AND OTHER FACILITIES AND UNDERSTOOD IMPACT THESE STEPS COULD HAVE IN INTERNATIONAL BANKING CIRCLES. HOPEFULLY WE MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO GOA'S GROWING CONVICTION THAT IT MUST DEAL WITH TERRORIST PROBLEM AND SO SO QUICKLY. IF WE NUDGED THEM, AND I BELIEVE WE DID, IT WAS A USEFUL EXERCISE. I HAD IMPRESSION THAT VIGNES WAS  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BUENOS 03401 102037Z

NOT AS AWARE OF CONCERN IN DIPLOMATIC CORPS OVER TERRORIST PROBLEM AS ONE WOULD HAVE BELIEVED HIM TO BE. HE WAS THEREFORE SOMEWHAT PUZZLED AT FIRST AS TO WHY WE WERE CONTEMPLATING MEASURES AT THIS TIME. GOA HAD AGREED TO PROVIDE ALL POSSIBLE PROTECTION AND SINCE WE WERE PLEASED WITH COOPERATION WE HAD RECEIVED, WHY MAKE REDUCTIONS. DURING CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, HE SEEMED TO GET THE MESSAGE CLEARLY.  
HILL

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## Message Attributes

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